DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE
WITH BRIGADIER GENERAL DAVID PHILLIPS, DEPUTY COMMANDER,
COALITION POLICE ASSISTANCE TRAINING TEAMS
(VIA TELECONFERENCE)

LOCATION: THE PENTAGON, ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA

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MODERATOR: Brigadier General David Phillips, deputy commander for the CPAT in Baghdad, welcome to the bloggers roundtable. And if you've got an opening statement, we might as well just get started.

GEN. PHILLIPS: Well, thanks. I'm very excited to be able to have this opportunity.

I've only been back in Iraq now for about six, seven weeks; just came from the Pentagon. But this is starting my third tour over here, and the reason I'm kind of excited

is I'm optimistic with what I've seen since my first time over here in 2003, and then from what I saw all the way up until early 2005. There's been some progress, some significant progress.

MODERATOR: All right. Very good, sir.

Charlie Quidnunc.

Q Yeah. One of the things my readers are asking me about is, we see this kind of linear progress of at some point things get a little better and go better, and then they get a little worse and they get a little worse. Do you think it's possible that we could be reaching a point where the Iraqis are trained well enough to really provide their own security, or are we going to be there forever?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Oh, I'm very optimistic about the level of their training. I just came in from, you know, the area we call the "red zone" -- it was across the Tigris River of -- here in Baghdad. Just got back in about an hour-and-a-half ago, two hours ago. And from the last time I was here, we would drive up and down one area where there was a huge field and not much would ever take place in that field. Today there were Iraqi policemen walking near the field, there were kids in that field playing, and that's the first time I've ever seen children out there playing. And as we got to the intersection -- we were in humvees -- traffic policemen waived us through, so they were out there doing their job.

So I believe the Iraqi police are getting very capable in handling the law enforcement-type mission and traffic mission. The problem you have is -- you have to "template" over that -- that there's a lot of terrorists and insurgents who want to see them fail as opposed to succeed.

MODERATOR: Very good.

Richard.

Q General, my name is Richard Fernandez from Belmont Club.

My question is this. The stereotype that is usually put forward is that the Iraqi army is relatively reliable, whereas the Iraqi police is a little bit more partisan and has, in fact, been accused of militia activity. You said that you've seen a change. Has there been an improvement in -- away from the stereotype since you've, you know, last looked?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Actually, from my last tour over here, we did not have the complaints of, you know, the fact that there was militia influence and influences like that. I've actually heard more of that since -- in the past year and since I've recently been back.

But what I have seen out there is that the Iraqi police are much more professional. They're doing their job. And when you compare the Iraqi army, who are over here

fighting an insurgency and against terrorists, we are training the police to perform law enforcement. The unfortunate part of that is, in addition to investigating crime and traffic patrols -- making sure that the traffic's going through a traffic circle -- they have to also fight terrorists and insurgents. The training we give them, although they get tactical training, is primarily focused on being a police officer.

MODERATOR: Megan Donovan.

Q Again, Megan Donovan with the GTL and CM -- Citizen Media. I'm following up a little bit, actually, on the previous questions. A few things, if I may.

First, how many trained police officers are there now there? What is that training time frame for an applicant? And then -- again, sort of a similar to the previous question -- we do get a lot of reports that this force is basically a trained and armed militia. Now, if that is not the case, or if some those are -- or some of those reports really are closer to the beginning of the year, and then some may be a couple of months ago, have there been any security changes, any changes in the vetting process that might be turning that around?

And if I can, just sort of as an overall picture, is it possible to give us an idea of, as far as security, is there -- operationally, is that separated out in any way between varying U.S. forces, the army, and then the Iraq police?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Wow. (Chuckles.) I'll do my best to catch that one and get those questions. I may have to have you refresh me on a few of them as we go through.

But right now we have a little over 200,000 trained police. Now, that includes the national police, which deploy throughout the country; the border police, who, you know, obviously are controlling the borders; and over a 160,000 going on 170,000 police officers that include patrol police, investigators, and what, you know, is basically the police you would see in any major metropolitan area.

As for the fact on whether or not they are influenced by a militia, I'm sure there's individual cases of that. But you have to look -- with a police officer, unlike the army -- when you join the army you deploy to different locations and you go as a unit. When you join the police, you train sometimes at academies close to your home, sometimes you walk to it; other times you may have to go a couple hours away. And at the end of the training, you go back to the same community you're in, where you grew up in or wherever you joined, and you're policing in the neighborhood where your family is, with the same influences you have, with people who are like you. It's as if you joined the police force in Cleveland, Ohio and went to training down in Columbus, Ohio, but you go back to Cleveland and you're still a Cleveland Indians fan. You're going to have the influences from those areas.

So when you look, is one police force in this city predominantly Sunni and one in another city predominantly Shi'a? Yes, it's going to be natural that way. But we also

have mixed forces in the towns that are mixed -- Baghdad, which tends to be somewhat mixed, and we have a significant number of Sunni and Shi'a on the police force.

As for vetting them, we've got multiple areas where we're working to vet them, and it's the Iraqis doing the vetting now. We're assisting, we're providing support on this. But we use a biometrics -- the Iraqis are -- fingerprints, one of the primary areas on there; also retinal scans; and then the police records. We have over 400 individuals in the database. So when a new person decides they want to join the police -- and we have no shortage of people wanting to become Iraqi police officers -- we -- and I'm referring to Iraqis because I work hand-in-hand with them -- they screen them. And if they were ever picked up by coalition forces before or if they were in the former regime's criminal database, which we were able to recover a significant amount of that and then upload it into the AFIS system, which is the Automated Fingerprint Identification System -- if they are picked up on that, that immediately throws up a red flag. This is before any of the local vetting is done -- from the area, you know, where they do the background; can they read and write?

So the biometrics is much better. We are catching people who were just released from a coalition facility, or just released from an Iraqi jail, who are now trying to be police officers. But I think the vetting process is not perfect, but it's catching quite a few who you would not want to be one of your community cops on the corner.

Q Okay. And if -- and if we can, that has been in place pretty much all along, that process? Or have there been any major changes recently?

GEN. PHILLIPS: No, we've actually made some significant changes. Initially we did not have an automated system that worked throughout the country. Now the Iraqis have their own AFIS database. They query it, and they have a central hub to where, if you want to join in the southernmost portion of Iraq or in the northernmost, it will all run through the national system. And this is actually improving on a weekly and monthly basis. We have several dedicated civilians from the States who are up there helping them do this. We also have one military officer who's over there who's very familiar with the AFIS system in the States, who is coaching, mentoring and teaching them. So I would say we've made big strides, especially in the past six months.

Q Okay, thank you.

GEN. PHILLIPS: Sure.

Q General, David Danelo, Editor of U.S. Cavalry ON Point. I'm also a former Marine officer, served in Iraq, in Fallujah in 2004.

I wanted to ask and follow up just on Meghan's question a little bit. Towards the end of your answer, you talked about how criminals are sometimes caught in the vetting process. Given the robustness of the policing capability that you quote, that 200,000 trained police, national border, and all that, what actually happens when criminals are

caught or when insurgents are caught? What is the judicial and corrections process that they go through? Could you talk us through that a little bit?

GEN. PHILLIPS: I sure can, because this is actually developing and starting to get very refined. When we -- just recently I was over there to view how things were going on and they showed me from that morning four hits -- four of the individuals who were applying to be police officers all came back with positives, which meant that they had some type of criminal background.

One of them had been picked up by the coalition but was subsequently released because they went though the Combatant Review Status Board and then was determined that they could be released. That individual was then -- the Iraqis make a decision based on that if they will allow him on the force.

The other three all had criminal records during the former regime. And of them, one of them, the criminal record was somewhat -- it was for, you know, demeaning the former regime, and the person served in jail for that. So I guess some of the Iraqis -- now they make look at him that he was a freedom fighter.

The other two were basic thugs. They were criminals, and that information was right there, the Iraqi had it, and they make a determination. When I say "they," it's the hiring process under the Ministry of the Interior. And they will say whether this one should be allowed to come in or this one should not. We don't make that decision. And as a matter of fact, we do not even give a recommendation on that. We just help them with the system that provides them that information.

I've seen that they have significantly barred numbers of individuals who came back as having anything to do with fighting the -- you know, the democratic process here or who have been involved with insurgent activity. And if they were picked up by coalition forces in Fallujah during your time frame, you know, we have that in the database. And if that hits, most likely those people are not allowed on the force. And I've seen to where they've given rejection lists back -- who was not allowed, the people are not vetted through. Not a perfect system, but the Iraqis are calling out a lot of the ones you would not want to be your local neighborhood cop.

Q I'll follow up on that a little bit later when I get a --

GEN. PHILLIPS: Sure.

Okay.

MODERATOR: David Axe (ph), you're next.

Q Thanks.

Hi, General. Thanks for taking the time. Really appreciate it.

GEN. PHILLIPS: Well, I appreciate the opportunity. Thanks. I actually like bragging about the Iraqi police because I'm just -- I've worked with them for so long over so many different periods. I'm a pretty big proponent of them. I think the world of a lot of them, and I have some that I consider personal friends that will be my friends for a very long time.

Q Great.

Do you see a difference in terms of the challenges facing cops in north-central Iraq versus those in the south?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Yes, I would have to say I do. Down in the south, it is a predominately Shi'a area. The neighborhoods are Shi'a, very few Sunnis, and the people that train to be policemen there go right back into their own communities -- most of them train down south -- and the influences are not as apparent.

But when you come up into the central area, you have a mixed population -- some Christian, some Sunni, some Shi'a -- and that's where you start getting into the tensions. And I think, you know, some of you are probably very familiar with that. When you have a mixed area, there are some biases that inflame all of the way up into, you know, from fistfights and worse.

So yes, if you want to be a police officer in Baghdad, you have probably a more significant challenge than if you want to down in Basra.

Q I'm sorry, a follow-up to that.

GEN. PHILLIPS: Sure.

Q Are you still seeing -- I know in the south there had been a problem -- and perhaps elsewhere in Iraq as well, but at least in the south -- there had been a problem with station police chiefs doing their own sort of unofficial recruiting; you know, say, bringing a cousin into the force and giving him a uniform and a gun, but he's never officially on the rolls and he hasn't gone through any of the vetting or national training. Are you still seeing that happening?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Well, not exactly in the way you're describing it. See, what you just described, that individual would not get paid because of the fact they have to be on the actual rolls with the Ministry of Interior in order to receive pay. Sure, you could give them anything, but if they're not on the rolls, you never know they're there and, you know, most Iraqis that want to be policemen want to receive a paycheck.

Now, let's say you bring your cousin on and they got through the biometrics. They're going to have to go through the biometrics because all of that is coded in before they are allowed to be paid. Then, once the biometrics are done and this individual --

even though he may be your cousin -- was recruited, and he comes up to the Ministry of Interior; they say, okay, this person can be brought on as a police officer. They are then put into a queue waiting to go to official training.

So although any police chief could probably do that -- say, "Here, I'm going to give my cousin, my nephew a uniform" -- they can't give them a gun because of the fact those are -- those are controlled. I mean, we track the serial numbers that's been turned over to Iraqis and they do inventories and follow up on that. But the pay thing is the problem.

So yes, you're always going to have somebody, too, try to get somebody onto the system. But if they meet all the criteria and the Ministry of the Interior, says, yep, they're good to go, okay, then you just happen to know the police chief and he happened to get you to the front of the line as opposed to the back.

But we do have no problem recruiting. I mean, when you see some of the situations with a bomb going off at a recruiting station, the reason sometimes the violence is so high is because we have so many people wanting to be police.

Q Okay, thank you.

GEN. PHILLIPS: Sure.

MODERATOR: And I heard a few more beeps on there as -- who joined us?

Q Hey, Jack. Tim Cobrad (ph).

MODERATOR: All right, Tim.

Q Jared Fishman (ph) has joined also.

MODERATOR: Okay, Jared.

As a matter of fact, he joined us a little late, but we've gone through the list, everyone has had a chance to ask a question. So if you'd -- if you have a question for General Phillips, it's your turn.

Q Great. Thank you.

Thank you, General, for your time.

Just -- when I do a weekly "good news" report, we try to stick with things that have happened recently that we can bring to people's attention, trying to fight the impression that everything is going to pot and that nothing ever improves. Obviously, a lot of the stuff you said is helpful, but can you give something kind of specific that in the

last few weeks we've seen is a change that we can say, hey, this is demonstrating the progress that we're making every day, every week, every month?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Okay. Actually, I think I can answer that one for you.

I spoke a little bit earlier about a situation that took place about two hours ago today, that over the past two weeks, I've been going up very frequently throughout Baghdad, stopping at police stations, stopping at some of the headquarters. Today, when I went out -- and actually over the past week -- I have noticed the traffic police are keeping the jams from really plugging all the streets up. There's traffic circles in Baghdad, and the traffic police are out there keeping the cars going. And even with me being in humvees, they got us right through the intersection so we could keep on going. And then I saw police on the streets walking just down there, talking with people.

Today there was an area that was an open field that I've seen over the past few years -- today is the first time I saw kids out there running around playing; the one end they were kicking a soccer ball, but there were a lot of other kids out there. There were two policemen just walking by the side of it. And so I said, "Ah, this is what it's supposed to look like."

MODERATOR: Okay, very good.

We've got a few more minutes left. Is anyone have a follow-up?

Q Yeah, I do. This is Charlie Quidnunc at WhizBang.

MODERATOR: Sure.

Q One of my readers is interested in understanding what percentage of the Iraqi geography is under Iraqi police control with minimal involvement. And what's the timetable for rolling out that kind of Iraqi-led police force with minimal involvement of U.S. forces?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Well, I would say right now approximately 75 percent of the country gets very minimal coalition force presence and it's been under the control of the Iraqi police and Iraqi army, and they're out there doing what you expect them to do in this country.

Under the smaller portion of the country, primarily in Baghdad area, a little bit up towards Baqubah, those areas where we have -- we've seen some more violence, it is not coalition military police that are out there leading the Iraqi police; it is truly Iraqis in the lead now. We provide them support and we're out there to reinforce them. If they're out doing a simple investigation and all of a sudden a terrorist starts shooting at them, of course, they do not have the firepower to return; they're police officers. But they contact us and we respond.

Right now it is Iraqis in the lead. If you took the equation of the terrorists and the insurgents out of the mix, you have a nationally trained police force that I think would be able to do quite well. The problems is you add into dimension of those terrorists and insurgents who want to see the Iraqi experiment in democracy fail.

Q So who is the most formidable foe? It is the Iraqi insurgents, or al Qaeda, or Iranians, or Congress? (Laughter.)

GEN. PHILLIPS: (Laughs.) I think the most formidable foe is the individual who doesn't want to see the average Iraqi make life a little better for themselves, their families, their children. It's that person that wants to take that away from them, whether that is a terrorist or an insurgent, al Qaeda or any of the other groups that are actually attacking what you would consider a civilized world.

Q General, Dave Danelo again.

Sir, I just wanted to follow up a little bit more about the whole process of what happens when a police officer, say, in Baghdad, catches somebody who's involved in a criminal act. Where do they go? Where does that criminal or thug -- what's the court process? What are they charged with? What's the -- where are they sent? How has that been -- can you walk us through that a little bit, sir?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Sure. I'll walk you through it and I'll show you where we're having some difficulties that we're working on, too.

Let's use, for example, that's it's a serious crime -- assault, a really bad assault, and the Iraqi police catch the individual that assaulted the person. And I'm not just talking pushing. Somebody really got beaten bad. But yet it's a criminal act, not a terrorist act. That individual is taken to the police station in that locality. They are then locked into a detention holding cell right there, and within 72 hours they are supposed to be taken in front of an investigative judge. The judge makes a determination and I'll tell you, there's a little problem in this, too. But the judge -- when they're taken in front of that judge, he makes a determination based upon the evidence that's provided by the police who made the apprehension, whether or not there is enough evidence to hold this person over for additional investigation and then subsequent trial. If the Iraqi police come and they do not present a very good case to show the probable cause on why this individual should be held, the judge at that point can release them.

If it is determined, yes, they have credible evidence that this individual did the assault, he will then be held over and kept in jail while the Iraqi investigators complete the investigation, and then he will be brought in front of a actual judge who determines the case. The case will be heard and then the individual will either be found innocent or guilty. If guilty, they go to one of the Iraqi prisons.

Now the reason you may have heard --

Q Sir?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Yes, go ahead.

Q Just quickly in there, can you give me an example of what's characterized as credible evidence?

GEN. PHILLIPS: Okay. I am -- I'm not a lawyer, but I'm a 27-year military policeman, and it's basically probable cause that you would see either going into a grand jury-type environment in the United States or that would be given over at an arraignment to where you arraign somebody over for trial. So if you have a witness statement that actually witnessed this individual, they made the sworn statement that they saw this individual beat this person and then the person who was beaten makes a statement, that would absolutely be credible evidence to hold them over.

Q Got it. Thank you, sir.

GEN. PHILLIPS: But there is a point that -- I probably want to point out on where you've heard the issues. Okay, overcrowding in the detention cells. Yes, there's overcrowding. And the reason is because of the number of investigative judges. That number is growing on a weekly basis, and General Petraeus' initiative now for a rule of law complex right within the Baghdad area where you have everything in one place -- the investigative judges, the investigators, and then the regular judges and even a prison -- that part is standing up and it's going to get the system to move faster. So the issue, you see, is sometimes when an individual's arrested, they are supposed to, by Iraqi law, have 72 hours to go in front of that investigative judge. If there's a delay there, that's where you start seeing crowding in the jails and that's where -- when the military police go around and monitor those jails -- and they're monitoring, now, they're not running -- that'll be reported up and that is where we, as coalition forces, can attempt to encourage the Minister of the Interior's people to move the system along -- keep it moving. But it's normally just a backlog in cases as opposed to not having any type of resolution.

The system in place as templated is a pretty good system. We just have to get the number of judges, the facilities and all of that stood up.

Q Now could you talk to the Anbar Salvation Council when they're bringing in their own militia now from the Sunni tribes and acting under Sheik Sitar on our side now. But when you see pictures of these guys -- and it's good that they're on our side, but they really don't look too much different from the insurgents used to look because some of the used to be. How are they being brought in and mainstreamed so that they're going to have loyalty to the state instead of to the tribe or to whoever they want to be loyal to?

GEN. PHILLIPS: I am absolutely involved with the middle of that, you know, situation right now. And I can use an example that even comes in a little closer that's on the border of Anbar, and that's in Abu Ghraib -- the city area, not the prison that you're familiar with. But the actual city of Abu Ghraib has just shook up under the sheiks their

own type force, but what they are doing with this force is they want to come into the system -- be sanctioned as police. They want to be trained as police. Their concern is if they're trained, will they be sent out of that area and then have to work in an area -- they're predominantly Sunni -- if they -- would they have to work in a predominantly Shi'a area? That's where they object. So we're trying to work right now -- how will the command and control work for these organizations? We're bringing them on as what the Marines are calling the Emergency Reaction Forces -- our Special Security Forces. And they're police officers -- they'll get training, but the fact is we have to get the sanction so that the government is the controlling agency.

That's still the tricky point that we're trying to work out there because some of the sheiks are suspicious on -- okay, who will control their family members? And right now we have General Odierno, General Petraeus -- they're intimately involved with that and trying to work out all of those type issues. But the situation you're talking in al-Anbar is exactly the same. Who will control them? And right now out in Anbar, it's the PIDOP (ph), which is the police director. He's the senior police officer within al-Anbar Province. He has command and control over those police forces. And actually, we're standing up a brand-new police academy which will be opening shortly out in al-Anbar in Habbaniyah, where we will train those -- what you see, you may call them -- they look like -- just like some of the other people you would want to pick up. But they will go through training, they will go into a uniform, they will be paid by the Ministry of Interior as police officers and that's what they will be.

But this is something, and if you look at this more as community law enforcement -- like a community watch -- they're tired of the terrorists and the insurgents coming in and -- you know, making problems for the people in they're community. So they're trying to do something about it, but they're trying to do it under the sanction of the government. But that is the tricky point here. When you start adding the dynamics in of Sunni, Shi'a, Kurd -- all of that makes it a little more problematic. It's a rosy picture because I'm optimistic that we're moving forward and you're seeing some success stories in al-Anbar. But I won't tell it's going to be an easy process. There's always going to be the issue on "Who is my son going to work for when he becomes a police officer, and will he stay in my community or are you going to send him halfway across the country?" That's some of the things that have to be worked out.

MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, sir. We are out of time here. Appreciate your time -- taking the time with us this morning.

Is there a closing statement? Do you have any last comments?

GEN. PHILLIPS: I just want to say I really appreciate the opportunity to get to talk to all of you, and I appreciate what you're doing in getting out -- you know, some of the issues that are going on over here. There's a lot of issues, but I think we've got a lot of great young men and women from across the country -- United States and from across the coalition forces that are giving a hundred percent effort to try to make this -- the Iraqis' commitment to democracy a reality because we do have a great deal of committed

Iraqis who are committed to democracy. And I'm just proud to serve with them. I've been here a long time, I look forward to getting back to my family, but right now I feel I'm part of history here and I'm doing my best to make a difference.

And the one individual who mentioned that he was in Fallujah, I was actually out there in 2004 providing military police. And you would not recognize it now compared to what you saw in 2004. Fallujah is a much different city and I think you're seeing law enforcement returning to the streets.

Q Sir, I've heard of that.

GEN. PHILLIPS: I really appreciate the opportunity.

Q Thank you, General.

MODERATOR: Thank you, General.

GEN. PHILLIPS: Okay. Thank you.

MODERATOR: And I hope we can do this again soon.

GEN. PHILLIPS: I would look forward to it. Thanks so much for the opportunity again.

MODERATOR: Thank you, sir.

GEN. PHILLIPS: Have a great day.

MODERATOR: You, too.

GEN. PHILLIPS: Bye.

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